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# **Migration and education: Child migrants in Bangladesh**

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## **Abstract**

The paper examines the rural-urban migration patterns of children who move to Dhaka city, Bangladesh, either on their own or with their parents. It explores the consequences that the migration process driven by economic and social reasons has on children's education. The paper is based on a critical review of the available literature on child labour in Bangladesh and of academic studies on child labour migration. The findings of this work show that the inter-links between migration and education are more complex than the simple assumption that children's migration undermines their education and the literature suggests an ambivalent picture. However, poverty as well as the poor standards of education in the country, are strong arguments in explaining these linkages.

## Introduction

This paper seeks to describe and discuss the internal migration patterns of children in Bangladesh who migrate from rural areas to the capital city of Dhaka and to explore the consequences that this mobility has on their scholarisation. It does not deal with migration for education but it rather tries to explain the effects and consequences that the migration process driven by economic and social reasons has on children's education.

In Bangladesh internal migration from rural to urban areas has become a livelihood strategy adopted by an increasing number of families who migrate to the capital city in search of better employment opportunities. Several studies (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005; Narayan et al., 2002) also suggest that an increasing number of children every year migrate either permanently or seasonally to Dhaka city. They move on their own, in groups or with siblings in search of job opportunities available in the city or to escape from abusive and oppressive situations at home.

The issue of child migration has received scant attention in development discourses in Bangladesh and it is almost absent in the available literature on migration studies in the country. This is because there is the tendency to consider children as 'passive movers' migrating only in response to their families' decision. In Bangladesh prevails a strong adult-child hierarchy, where parents and guardians are invested with extensive power and authority over their children. The patronage system seems to confine the children to a respectful and docile passive role and this contributed to consider them as passive players in the migration process. This paper analyses the migration patterns of children moving to Dhaka, both on their own or with their parents, stressing the role of children as active decision-makers in the migration process.

The dearth of printed material on child migration issues specifically in Bangladesh makes its analysis a difficult task although challenging and interesting. In 2001-2, I lived and worked in Bangladesh for an Italian NGO that was running in partnership with a local organisation, a non-formal education project in five slums of Dhaka city. I noticed that the majority of the people living in the slums were migrants coming from different rural areas of the country. However, child migrants found themselves excluded from the benefits of the project since their mobility was considered to negatively affect their attendance

at school. This paper is therefore an attempt to deepen my understanding of child migration patterns and of the links between these and their school attendance.

This resulting paper bases itself on a critical review of secondary sources. The literature available comes mainly from development organisations active in the field of advocacy and mobilisation against child labour. I discuss also various academic studies on child labour migration that, although are not specifically on Bangladesh, have been of great help in supporting my argument. Most of the advocacy literature focuses mainly on the working conditions in both the formal and informal sectors where children are employed and highlights their exploitative dynamics to which they are subjected. There is no mention or analysis of the migration process and how this affects children livelihoods in the city. However, the increasing emphasis among development agencies and humanitarian workers in involving children in research and listening to children's personal stories, provides valuable information from which it is possible to get insights on the broader patterns of child migration in the country.

This paper tries to answer to the following core questions: what are the determining factors that contribute to autonomous child migration and to migration of children accompanied by one or both relatives? What are the consequences of child migration on their school attendance? Do children migrating with their parents have less or more opportunities to attend school than children migrating alone?

The paper will be organised as follows: section one begins with a brief account of the existing debate on the definition of children and childhood within the Child Right Convention framework, in order to contextualise the experience of childhood in Bangladesh. For the purpose of this study, I will consider children from the age group of 6 to 17 years old which corresponds to children attending primary and secondary education. Section two explores the characteristics of child migrants, trying to understand the factors contributing to their migration and how their decision to leave home varies according to gender, age, education and family's socio-economic backgrounds. I will identify the causes which induce parents and their children to move to Dhaka, with a particular attention to the position of children within the migration process

and the livelihood strategies that children and adults set in place once they arrive in the receiving area, such as, the work they do and the places where they settle. The last section explores the inter-link between migration and the education of children migrating either on their own, or with their parents. It starts by providing a brief overview of the education system in Bangladesh, focusing on primary and secondary education and the co-existence of formal and informal systems. In doing so I will underline the main causes of the poor quality of education offered. I will examine the level of education of children who migrate both alone or with their parents prior to migration and after it, in order to trace the link between education or the lack of it, and patterns of child migration.

This discussion will challenge the simple assumption that children's migration undermines children's education. Rather, the literature suggests an ambivalent picture, shedding light on more negative, as well as positive aspects. The poverty argument is strong in Bangladesh, where many children are forced to work to support themselves or their families (Ahmad, 2004: 227) and therefore migration becomes a sheer mean of livelihood; however the poor standards of education offered in the country represent one of the fundamental causes of education failure.

## **Defining children**

According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), approved by the UN General Assembly in November 1989, any person under the age of 18 is a child (Article 1). Although article 12 recognises that there are gradations of childhood and that children have evolving capacities, 18 remains the defining limit between childhood and adulthood. It must be noted that each country that signs and subsequently ratifies the Convention is free to enter a comment about one or more article with which there is disagreement. In other words, the Convention allows each member state to follow its domestic laws and customs in defining a child according to the relevant context. As Bissell (2003: 55) points out, "the Convention really tries to do two things, to embody universalistic principals while still recognising, implicitly, that childhood is a social construct".

Bangladesh ratified the Convention in 1991 but many laws, regulations and Acts related to the 'concept' of child in response to different circumstances had been enacted long before Bangladesh became independent and they show several inconsistencies. The Bangladesh Majority

Act of 1875 defines a child as a person who is below the age of 18 years, while the Children Act of 1974 states that a person below the age of 16 years is a child. Even the labour law reveals some inconsistency: The Employment of children Act of 1938 for example, does not allow the employment of children below 12 years in regular jobs, with the exception of apprentices; while the Factories Act of 1965 prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factories. In Bangladesh, the legal system also makes a gender distinction in defining a child and this becomes particularly evident in the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, where the age of majority for contracting a valid marriage, has been fixed at 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls. Again, under national Muslim law, a child becomes an adult on attaining the age of puberty, which is usually set at the age of 12 years for girls and 15/16 years for boys (cited in Siddiqui, 2001: 10). From this brief discussion, it is clear that these laws and regulations relating to children in response to different social and economic conditions, did not lead to a uniform age in defining a child.

As Bissell (2003: 51) highlights, the Convention, a part from being a profound statement of the world's commitment to children, is "the most vivid representation of the global social construction of childhood". This agreement articulates each aspect of a child's life from concerns for survival and development, to those for protection and participation. The Convention for example, underpins the belief that school is the more appropriate context than work for children's growth and development, and it is in the best interest of all children to be economically dependent, at least until a specified age (Siddiqui, 2001). Boyden and Myers (1998: 195) state that the minimum age standard set by the Convention "expresses an ideal of childhood as a privileged phase of life properly dedicated only to play and schooling, and with an extended period of dependence during which economic activity is discouraged or actually denied". This model of childhood seems so natural and right that it is assumed to represent the universal norm for how all children should be raised; however, "there is no scientific evidence that this particular sort of childhood produces children who are happier, better adjusted, or more fully developed than do other types of childhood" (Boyden and Myers, 1998: 195). In this respect, White (2002) questions the logic of child rights and its validity for the cultural context of Bangladesh. She argues that the gap between the rights that children have as stated in CRC theory and the absolute reality of

their practical experience is simply too great for the children, often leading to child frustration and depression when they attend training on their rights.

## Children and childhood in Bangladesh

The anthropologist Theres Blanchet (1996) attempts to capture the essence of childhood in Bangladesh society with her book 'Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhood'. She refers to the 'pollution' of children who entered the adult world at an early stage, mainly through work. She says that they are considered by the *samaj* (society) as 'spoiled' for being exposed to the adult world and therefore are not considered children anymore. Blanchet's work has partially been questioned by Bissell (2003) who argues that just the book title itself suggests a particular author's vision of childhood: the one that has been stolen. According to Bissell, Blanchet does not write about 'a different childhood' or 'Bangladeshi childhood' but about Bangladeshi children relative to the Child Rights Convention. She blames Blanchet of being writing for a Western audience thus giving "an interesting but in some way sensationalised picture of what it is like to be a child, particularly a poor child, in a culture which bears little or no resemblance to the middle-class culture in which the term flourished" (Bissell, 2003: 57). Similarly, White (2002) talks about a tendency of 'cultural imperialism' in development discourse and draws attention to a conceptualisation of childhood drawn from the West.

There is not a simple word or phrase to describe the concept of childhood in Bengali nor does there exist a specific age commonly accepted as the age of passage from being a child to an adult age. '*Shishu*' is the word commonly used by development agencies to translate the 'child' of 'child rights', but it normally refers only to infants and young children (Blanchet, 1996). However, other key elements, such as the experience the child has gained as well as physical and emotional development, in turn influenced by gender, make the difference between being considered a child or a grown-up being giving access to responsibilities in the society (White, 2002). Parents and children also manifest a lack of knowledge in reporting their age. They often refer to a range of time, usually within two or three years as proximity of their biological age. This is partially the result of an inefficient birth registration system, but it is especially the consequence of a different approach to age evaluation. The age for Bangladeshi children is in the experiences they have gained, not the number

of years they have been living. Parents too report the biological age of their children at their convenience. For instance, they send their children to school not at a strict specific age, but when consider their child 'ready' for it (Blanchet, 1996). Consequently the boundaries of Bangladeshi childhood vary according to life experiences, the autonomy and authority gained, physical development and convenience (Bissell, 2003).

In Bangladesh, the adult-child relationship is characterised by an extremely high degree of asymmetry and non reciprocity, within and outside the household, giving adults the right to dispose of the children as they wish. This is reflected even in the national laws which, for example, confer a special status on the father concerning important matters related to children's life and future development. For this reason the Government of Bangladesh refused in 1991, to ratify article 14 on Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion contained in the CRC provision, observing that "being immature by definition, a child is not in the position to consider such complex issues properly" (cited in Blanchet, 1996: 2).

Children are trained to conform to the codes, rules and conventions set down by the society through structures of power and authority learned in the households. Families' reputation is highly affected by the conduct of their children, especially girls who have to conform to *pardah* (female seclusion) from an early age, normally soon after puberty (Blanchet, 1996, Kabeer, 2000). In Bangladesh there prevails a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal social system, which shapes men's and women's lives, as well as those of their children. Men are accustomed, as bread-winners and decision-makers in the family, to exercising strong authority over their wives and children. Furthermore, children are affected by the socialisation process differently according to gender lines: girls are in fact expected to be docile and compliant daughters and be integrated into their husband's family upon marriage, while boys are trained as future leaders of the family (Blanchet, 1996). As we can see, the hierarchy of adult-child is quite strong and the patronage system seems to confine the children to a respectful and docile passive role.

In the light of this brief discussion, the abstraction of children as a distinct social group with specific set of entitlements, away from their contexts of family and community is very hard to defend (White, 2002). However, advocacy of children's rights and the relatively recent focus on participative methods, have led to the recognition of

children as active agents of change, a distinct constituency deserving separate attention.

### *Children as an economic asset*

In Bangladesh, children clearly have an economic value to their families since they contribute substantially to household welfare from a very early age (Cain, 1977). The structure of the household, reinforced by the socio-economic conditions and the agrarian intensive labour market, promotes a perceived economic value attached to the new born, especially if male. The large family, traditionally hierarchically structured, rely on the perception that a child is an economic asset, able to provide an income and extra labour power, which can be controlled by the household through traditional attitudes of parental power and filial duty (Ghuznavi et al, 2001). Parents also agree that for the child, work is an opportunity to gain experience and the dignity necessary to achieve a recognised position in the society. In this regard, child work is therefore seen as an initiation into adulthood (Nieuwenhys, 1994).

Child employment could also be a strategy adopted by poor families to diversify their portfolio of activities thus reducing socio-economic vulnerability (Ahmad and Quasem, 1991). In addition, female children are taught from an early age to accomplish domestic chores within the household, duties that are considered to be good for safeguarding their reputation and finding a suitable husband (Blanchet, 1996). On the other hand, work for female children is especially important in delaying marriage and providing them with economic independence. As Zohir and Paul-Majumder (1996) point out in their studies on garment workers in Dhaka city, the recent trend of young girls aged 10-14 years, coming to the city from rural areas to seek work in the formal sector, is a major departure from the older social norms which see girls confined into domestic work.

### **Migration of children to Dhaka city**

In Bangladesh, large-scale movement of the population has been a feature for a very long time; people have been moving internationally and internally, but the most striking form of mobility has indeed been from rural to urban areas (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005). As in most developing countries, massive migration has occurred in the direction of the capital, Dhaka (Begum, 1999). The rapid increase in the number of landless families in rural areas together with other economic and social changes, have converged to push poverty-stricken

families to urban areas to seek new ways of livelihood (Pelto, 1997).

Dhaka, has to cope with the increasing pressure of population growing at a rate far beyond the ability of the economy to provide an adequate level of basic social services (Begum, 1999) and it is expected to become the sixth largest mega-city of the world by 2010, with a present population of already 12.3 million (UNCHS, 2001). Rural-urban migration of adults as well as children has been the major cause of this fast growth (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005; Afsar, 2000; Begum, 1999; Ahmed and Jasimuddin, 1996). Child labour and child migration are not a unique phenomena of Bangladesh, but is widespread across South Asia, as well as in Africa. However, a striking feature of the Bangladeshi workforce is that it includes 6.3 million children under the age of 14 (Narayan et al., 2002), most of whom have been migrating from rural villages to the capital city, either to escape from a violent and oppressive situation at home or to find employment opportunities more available in the city.

The purpose of this section is precisely to explore the characteristics of child migrants. In doing so, I will try to underline that in some cases, children and young people are active-decision makers rather than passive players in the migration process. The present section also explores the causes which induce parents and their children to move to Dhaka, attempting to highlight the position of children within the migration process. It also examines the livelihood strategies that children and adults set in place once they arrive in the receiving area such as the work they do and the places where they settle.

### **Migration of children: theoretical framework**

In Bangladesh, children have always received scant attention in the migration process and this is probably due to the same reasons that kept women mostly invisible for a long time when dealing with migration patterns. In Bangladesh, where a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal social system prevails, female migrants in fact, have often been considered as 'passive movers' migrating in response to marriage or following the male head of the household (Kabeer, 2000; Afsar, 2003). Similarly, children have not been considered as an independent constituency who gradually develop a sense of agency and autonomy, since parents and guardians are invested with extensive power and authority over their children (Blanchet, 1996). The majority of the literature on child labour and child

migration portrays children as having little or no agency (cited in King, 2002), thus assuming they always migrate with parents or when they migrate alone, parents are the ones who decide whether to send their children to urban areas to work or not.

A number of other studies, however, (Iversan, 2002; Kielland et al., 2002; Punch, 2002) show evidence that the decision to migrate in order to take up paid work is often made by children themselves. Similarly, Kabeer (2003: 372) states that children, and in particular those coming from less privileged backgrounds, “exercise far greater agency in the decisions which affect their lives than is conventionally recognised”. For the purpose of this analysis, I consider autonomous migrants children who migrate without the company of their immediate kin, or migrate on their own or in the company of friends, relatives and neighbours.

There are several theories developed by scholars on migration. Although this work concentrates on children’s position within the broader migrant population, the theories developed to explain the determinants of migration are the same. According to one of the few specific studies existing on migration of children to Dhaka city (Ahmed and Jasimuddin, 1996), the migration of children to the capital is explained as the result of urban pull factors and rural push factors. Migration is therefore viewed from a structural perspective as a product of income differentials and perceived earning opportunities between urban and rural areas (Lee, 1966; Lewis, 1982). This so called ‘push-pull’ theory, in our specific context, assumes that certain factors such as greater job opportunities, land availability and social and cultural freedom in the area of destination operate as factors ‘pulling’ individual and children to urban areas. On the other hand, high population density, poor quality of education, the rupture of family relationships, natural calamities, lack of economic opportunities and hence poverty, operate as determinant forces ‘pushing’ child migrants out of their rural original areas. This approach implies that individual rational actors decide to migrate because a cost-benefit calculation leads them to expect a positive net return (Massey et al., 1993).

This neo-classical theory has been amply challenged by the more recent social capital theory, which suggests that migration decisions are not made individually but as part of larger units of people. Bourdieu (1986: 248) defines the social capital possessed by an individual or a group as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of

more or less institutionalised relationship of mutual acquaintance”. According to this theory, the decision to migrate is therefore largely influenced by interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin (Massey et al., 1993). These ties increase the likelihood of mobility, both internal and international, since they reduce the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration.

Applied to child migration, this theory outlines the importance of the social network to enhance children’s autonomous migration and to guarantee a certain degree of safety in their mobility. Iversan (2002), in his study on autonomous behaviour of children in the migration process, stresses that when children have their own social networks, this may reduce the incentives to co-operate with parents by affecting mobility costs through the provision of valuable information about labour opportunities, pre-arrangement of employment, or the provision of other support. The same author shows evidence that social networks perpetuate the migration process, leading to chain or serial migration and they can be catalysts for behavioural change. He refers to stories of girls who had been attracted by the migration experiences of other neighbouring girls or friends whose work provided means to assist families as well as to stand on their own feet, notwithstanding the loss of status their migration imposed on their fathers.

However, in the case of Bangladeshi child migrants, social networks are often limited to family based ones. The advocacy literature on child labour in Bangladesh referring to children moving in search of better livelihoods, demonstrates that the migration of children is often facilitated either by some relatives or by neighbours and friends. But in rural villages, as Kabeer (2000) points out, the habit of calling ‘uncle or aunt’ to even unrelated people makes it difficult to understand the actual parental degree of individuals. Children also share strong bonds with members of the extended family (Blanchet, 1996) and therefore family based social networks become predominant in discussing the migration of children.

## **Children migrating alone: the decision and its causes**

### *Poverty, the quest for work, and unemployment*

Child rural-urban migration in Bangladesh has been increasing in recent years as a drastic strategy for

coping with insecurity and economic hardship. A common strategy for poor families in rural areas for example, is to take children out of school during periods of economic strain and send them to the city to work as servants or apprentices (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005). Children, who come from very poor families where everybody's work is essential for survival, generally see it as their responsibility to work and earn money. They usually do not criticise their parents for sending them to work since they perceive it as a duty they have to accomplish to contribute to their families' income. Sometimes, they also "feel proud of the money they earn which gives them importance in the family" (Blanchet, 1996: 85).

The advocacy literature (Pelto, 1997; Khan et al., 1997; Rahman, 1995; Paul-Majumder et al., 1993) on child labour in Bangladesh tends to present children's migration to Dhaka city as a compulsion to work. These studies are mainly concerned with children as labourers rather than as migrants. However some of them based on the collection of life histories, provide also information about the characteristics of child migration and the causes behind it. Sohid's story shows some of these patterns (12-year-old boy, sales helper in a clothes store, Dhanmondi Hawkers Market, Dhaka):

Sohid is from the village of Kurakhana in the Comilla district. His father farms a small plot of land. His father also cultivates other people's land as a sharecroppers. His mother is a housewife. He has one brother and two sisters. His brother works in a wholesale shop that sells eggs. His eldest sister is married. The younger sister lives with his parents and reads in class III. Sohid cannot read or write, but he can write his own name. His mother used to insist that he goes to school and even beat him for not going ... but he did not like the studies at all. When he was 11 years old his father sent him to Dhaka along with his cousin who owns a clothing shop. Sohid was given a job in his shop. His father was forced to send him to Dhaka due to poverty. Now he works full-time in his cousin's shop. He calls out to the customers, shows them different items, and bargains with them. [...] He likes the job and does not face any difficulty or hazard in the work place. His cousin treats him with affection and kindness. He stays with him in the Dhaka college staff quarter. He gives him food three times a day. In addition to that he gets 5 taka per day as pocket allowance and 200 taka as monthly salary. Sohid sends the 200 taka to his parents every month. In future he wants to open a shop like this for

himself. Sohid does not find time to play. At night he watches television with his sister in law and her children. He loves the drama. Sometimes he misses his mother. Then he takes leave and goes to the village to visit his family. During his stay at his village home his parents treat him well. Sohid's elder brother who stays in Dhaka sometimes visits him.

(Source: Pelto, 1997)

Sohid's story portrays the migration to Dhaka city as an opportunity to learn new things and as a relief from a home situation of scarcity. He stays with his cousin's family who provides him with food and accommodation as well as love and care. The job he is performing is not particularly hazardous and it was arranged by his family's members. Sohid keeps contacts with his family back in the village; he sends part of his salary to them and goes back to the village from time to time where he is always welcomed. These features show us how child migration patterns change according to the way the departure takes place, if there still is a trust relationship with the adults they left at home or not. Most of the children interviewed by Pelto (1997), employed in the informal sector, reported that they had found their job through a family connection or a sort of 'village connection'. That is, people who know them from the home village or district and have recommended them to the employers. According to a study on child workers in the informal sector in Dhaka, carried out by Radda Barnen (Karmaker et al., 1994), the majority of the child labour migrants working in engineering workshops, automobile and garage workshops and in small factories fall between the ages of 11 and 15.

A part from poverty and the absolute need for paid work, the high rate of unemployment in rural villages is another factor that has been mobilising an increasing number of people from rural to urban areas. On the other side, the acceleration of industrialisation such as the rapid growth of the garment industry, for example, has been attracting a large number of young adults, especially girls, who left their villages to move to Dhaka city (Zohir, 2001). This sector has been object of critique for employing children, and in particular girls aged 13 to 17 years old (Blanchet, 1996). According to several studies on garment workers in Bangladesh (Kabeer, 2000; Zohir et al., 1996; Paul-Majumder et al., 1993), these girls have some years of schooling and suit the garment industry's demand of unskilled labour. According to Zohir et al. (1996), the reason why more educated girls have a higher propensity

to migrate is that they are more aware of outside opportunities and are better able to benefit from them. Furthermore, they can earn relatively higher incomes in urban areas compared to rural settings.

In many cases, the decision to migrate to Dhaka to take up work in the garment factories happened after a negotiation with the family's members. Females aged above 12 are expected to observe *purdah* (literally veil or curtain) which refers to Islamic female seclusion and are discouraged from engaging in outdoor work (Ahsan, 1997: 56). Therefore, these girls had to persuade their parents or relatives that this paid work would represent a great opportunity to contribute to the family's income or to provide advantages to their own lives, without compromising their reputation and eventually their marriage prospects (Kabeer, 2000; Afsar, 2000; Naved et al. 2001). They often secured their job in the garment industry prior to migration to the city through social networks with relatives or siblings in the village who were already employed in this sector. Moreover, once migrated, "migrant female workers maintain close ties with their natal family and village of origin in order to ensure as much security as possible, especially in marriage" (Naved et al., 2001).

#### *Alternative to school*

The decision to migrate for work is sometimes taken as an alternative to school. This may happen in cases where the child has dropped out of school because of lack of interest, bad results or because of a difficult relationship with the teacher. This can be illustrated by the stories of Bashir and Ilias (11 year-old workers in Dhaka):

Bashir comes from the village of Choumohoni in the district of Noakhali. He has one brother and one sister, his father is a farmer back in his home village... Bashir studied up to class III in a school but then his mother died and his father remarried. He was no longer able to attend school regularly and was beaten by his teacher so he decided to leave with his elder brother.

Ilias comes from a village called Alinagar in Barisal. He studied up to class I in the village. They do not own any land to cultivate on. Ilias' father cultivates other people land and manages his family with the little income he receives. He was not interested in studying, besides he was not able to attend school regularly because of all the household chores....One day he got a serious thrashing from his teacher for not doing his school work. From that day he never went back to school.

His parents tried to convince him to go back but he would not listen to anyone. As a result his father got angry and sent him to Dhaka with his uncle to look for work.

(Source: Pelto, 1997)

As will be explained in more detail in the next section, the poor quality of education, the lack of interest in it, or teachers abusive behaviour are often mentioned by children as the main causes of school abandonment. Rural poor parents view children as an economic asset (Cain, 1977) and their attendance at school represents a deprivation of their earnings. Some parents cannot afford to send their children to school while others may be willing to sacrifice an extra income in order to provide education for their children. However, if they drop out of school for some of the reasons mentioned above, children cannot afford to be idle and they immediately have to start working. Since job opportunities are scant in rural areas, they then migrate to the city.

#### *Rupture of family relationships*

The advocacy literature on street children in Bangladesh often refers to them as 'run away' children thus suggesting that their departure from home is not the result of a household decision but is merely the child's own decision. They are children who come from families where they feel emotionally, physically or sexually vulnerable and often end up living in streets; generally referred to as *street children* (Zakaria, 2004). In many families, one of the parents died and the rupture in the family structure places the children in great jeopardy. Children's stories in fact, often report of tension and difficulties with step-parents as being the main cause of their departure from home (Pelto, 1997).

According to a recent government study (ARISE, 2001), economic reasons are the driving force behind street child migration and "the influx of migration could be stopped if sufficient income earning opportunities are created in the rural sector through massive poverty alleviation interventions at the country side" (ARISE, 2001: 38-39). Economic poverty remains therefore the primary focus for intervention, even if reasons other than material poverty are mentioned, such as "parents' separation, parental death, sickness and social or family conflicts". However, Conticini (2004) in his study on children migrating to city streets in Dhaka, suggests a different interpretation. He argues that economic poverty is only one of the causes for child migration to city streets and "fighting economic

poverty alone, is not a comprehensive answer to the problem of run away children" (Conticini, 2004: 47). The same author found that children have thought a number of times before having the courage to leave home and they were rarely able to identify a single event which made them take this decision. Therefore the decision to leave is developed through time and assumes the characteristics of a process. Overall, it was the breakdown of trust within households that led them to move to the street. In this context, the departure from home is perceived by the children as a positive alternative to the acceptance of violence and abuse or excessive control at home.

The interview with Shumon (14-year-old boy) living on the street in Dhaka city, explains some important issues related to the breach of trust within the household:

'Once I left home I could have gone to stay with my uncle and live with him because he has a big house and a good job. However, life with him would not have been so different from the life I wanted to quit. I did not trust adults anymore and I did not want to be beaten by them for no reason. Here in Dhaka I could have gone to a relative's house but I prefer freedom, living with friends on the street ... The street gives me enough daal (lentils) to survive. I could have had more home comforts with my relatives, but what I seek now is to enjoy life with my friends and have security'

(Source: Conticini, 2004)

Shumon's words demonstrate that not all the children living on the street are from economically vulnerable families. The same author found in his study that these children were coming from very different economic backgrounds, ranging from severely poor to well-off households. Shumon could have gone to live with his uncle, benefiting from a big house and a job with him, but the rupture of trust with the adults' world made him dismiss this opportunity in favour of the street life.

In Bangladesh, violence towards children is very much intertwined with the concept of 'teaching a lesson' which allows children to justify and accept adult violence within a framework of a feeling of justice (Blanchet, 1996). As Conticini (2004) underlines, this point explains why some children abandon their households while others passively accept abuse as a normal action associated with "learning how to behave".

### *Demand for domestic workers*

Another way in which children migrate to Dhaka city is through the increasing demand for domestic workers, which are often recruited from poor families in rural villages. Therese Blanchet (1996: 96) in her study on child servants in Bangladesh, has pointed out that "unlike the trend observed in many parts of the world, domestic service in Bangladesh is not a disappearing occupation" and it also attracts very young children and especially girls. They generally are 6 – 16 years, most of whom are employed full time on a residential basis (Shamim et al., 1995).

A great number of empirical studies from different rural areas in Bangladesh show that most child domestic servants come from very poor families (Blanchet, 1996; Pelto, 1997; Rahman, 1995) but even in cases in which the family can provide for the basic needs of their children, such as food and clothes, this kind of employment is seen as a good preparatory school (Blanchet, 1996). The hard work, the strict discipline and the occasional punishment these girls are subjected to is believed to be good for safeguarding their reputation and finding a suitable husband. They can prepare to withstand the hardship they will have to cope with at their in-laws and they can also earn some money for their dowry (Blanchet, 1996). In other cases, the rupture of families, such as the death of one of the parents or their divorce, might be a reason for putting children into domestic services, thus ensuring they will be looked after by a new family. In the same circumstances, children might decide autonomously to take up this kind of employment for their own security rather than living on the street (Rahman, 1995). New child migrants might also see this form of employment as an entrance to the labour market, leading to other form of better employment in the future (Pelto, 1997).

### **The experience in Dhaka: working and living conditions**

When migrant children arrive at their destination, Dhaka city, their experience of adaptation to the new urban setting changes drastically according to the reasons that induced children to migrate, and the way the departure took place. Other factors, such as gender, age, education and their family's background, all play a crucial role in determining the coping strategies of these young migrants in the capital.

As we have discussed above, the breakdown of a trust relationship with the adults in the household

might induce children to take the decision to choose the street life rather than the family's one. These children usually arrive in Dhaka alone, in small groups by bus, or by train and once at destination they often separate, following their own instinct for survival (Conticini, 2004). This is the most difficult stage of their pathway since they are often caught by a feeling of fear and loneliness (Seabrook, 2001). They are mainly found at parks, bus terminals, launch/boat terminals, market places, railways station, around big mosques etc. (Zakaria, 2005). Their patterns of adaptation to street life depend on their experiences, opportunities, personal characteristics, gender and other variables. Street children have to acquire survival skills and techniques to perform street jobs. They are often engaged in some sort of work which allows them to cope with the rigours of urban life. They are found to be garbage pickers, cigarette sellers, water suppliers for markets, newspaper hawkers, beggars and other similar sorts of activities (Sarwar, 1996).

The street children often experience violent situations which are more severe than the ones suffered at home; and, the same hostile environment that made them leave home in the first place might be reproduced in the street. It is often reported that children are threatened and beaten by police and *mastaas*<sup>1</sup> in the street and the risk, especially for girls, to be sexually abused is very high (ARISE, 2001; TDH, 2005; Marium, 2004). However, the fact that the perpetrators on the street are mainly unknown people who do not have a trusted relationship with the children, seems to increase their level of tolerance to violence. Indeed, in the street the abusers are not trusted people, as parents, relatives or teachers can be in the villages that the children have left (Conticini, 2004).

The existing empirical studies on child domestic workers in Bangladesh (Blanchet, 1996; Pelto, 1997; Rahman, 1995; Shamim et al, 1995) all lead to the same kind of findings regarding children's conditions. The fact that they are confined within private houses might expose them to forms of violence and abuse, regardless of the community, class or economic status of the employer. They all work all day long and they normally sleep on the kitchen or veranda floor. Child servants often reported to miss their families in the villages and to feel a sense of loneliness; also due to the fact that they are not allowed to go back home very often,

on average 3 times per year. Sometimes they lose contact with their families completely, worsening their exposure to abuse since they have no one to turn to for support (Blanchet, 1996). Many of them receive no wage at all and parents often accept that their children work without pay in exchange for a promise that the employers will arrange, or at least cover, the cost of their marriage (Pelto, 1997; Blanchet, 1996).

As explained in the previous sub-section, child migration to Dhaka city can be a less traumatic experience when it is not the response to an abusive and violent situation at home or when, although decided by the parents, the child actively accepts his responsibility to work and earn money. In this context, children often move and live with close relatives already settled in the city who provide them with food as well as care (Pelto, 1997). They keep contact with their families back in the villages who they visit from time to time and they often send part of their salary to them. They are engaged in different kinds of work in the formal and informal sector. Many children, particularly those in a selling occupation are already small-scale entrepreneurs and they dream of setting up more permanent shops with the money they are saving in the current occupation. Others work for long hours in more hazardous occupation with highly unhealthy conditions, such as dangerous machinery and chemicals (Ahmad and Quasem, 1991).

Those employed in the garment factories, usually work as 'helpers' so they must stand all day during their work which has consequences on their health, especially when overtime work is due (Zohir et al., 1996; Ahmad and Quasem, 1991; Pelto, 1997). Although they work for long hours and the salary they earn is not very high, at least the pay is regular and relatively favourable compared with most other employment opportunities. Quotations from children's stories show that they often feel lucky to work in the garment sector which at least offers some form of regulation if compared, for example, with the secluded domestic work (Kabeer, 2000; Zohir et al, 1996; Pelto, 1997). The huge number of young girls who migrated to Dhaka specifically to be employed in the garment factories usually live with their relatives in more traditional households (Kibria, 1995; Zohir et al., 1996), but for those girls who migrated with relatives other than parents, there is the tendency to live in unconventional arrangements such as mess or hostels, thus challenging the traditional view that they need a male guardian (Naved et al., 2001; Kabeer, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> The word *mastaas* refers to the local mafia.

### *Children migrating with one or both parents*

As I have already mentioned above, migration of children does not always imply children moving autonomously and without the company of the parents, but also children moving with their families (Ahmed and Jasimuddin, 1996). Kabeer (2000), for example, in her analysis on women working in the garment sector, draws attention to an increasing number of young women in rural villages that, after having been left by their husband or due to the death of their spouse, decided to migrate with their children to Dhaka city to work in the garment factories, in order to be able to 'stand on their own feet' and to provide a better life to their children.

The children of these migrant women are often involved in different forms of employment to contribute to the family's income or to assist their parents at work, especially if they are very young. This is, for example, reported by the management of garment factories who often had to employ the children of their workers who could not be left at home alone (Zohir et al., 1996). The same pattern happens with women working as domestic servants who bring their children along with them because there is nobody else to look after them. This is often the way these children end up to be employed as domestic workers, following the path of their mothers either with the same family, or with other employer families (Pelto, 1997).

Dannecker (2002), in her study of women garment workers in Bangladesh, reported that a "classical" migration pattern of women and girls working in this sector was family reunification. The father was the first to leave the village to seek employment in the capital and once settled, all the family followed. The children of these migrant families, especially young girls aged 11-17, have the opportunity to exercise far greater autonomy compared to their counterparts still living in the villages. Their new experiences in the city sometimes changed the perception of their so-called ascribed role as good daughters. They discovered in the urban setting new and available job possibilities, such as the ones offered by the garment sector (Dannecker, 2002). Here is the story of Bilkis, who migrated to Dhaka city with her family when she was 4 years old and started working in the garment factories when she was 13 after convincing her father:

I came to Dhaka with my mother, my brothers and sisters when I was around four years old I think. My father was at that time already staying in Dhaka but was, as a truck driver, very often out of town. He said it would be better if we lived with him in town, therefore

we moved. We went to the village just for short vacations. Today my parents are living in the village again while I married and stayed here. I started working in the factory when I was 13 years old. I saw girls from the neighbourhood going to the factory every day and I wanted to join them. My father was very much against it and it took me sometimes to convince him. He said that women should not work outside the house, that this is not good for their reputation. I told him, and the neighbour women supported me, that this is may be still so in the village but not in Dhaka. Here it is different and people are used to women working outside the house. Finally he agreed. He realised that I really wanted to do something, especially since he had no intention to send me to school. I am the first woman in our family doing that kind of work. It was a wonderful time at the beginning. I was laughing and learning a lot through my work and I liked most that I always had people around me. Some of the money I got I gave them to my parents and the rest I used for myself.

(Source: Dannecker, 2002)

Bilkis' family background is representative of a sample of mothers who migrated to Dhaka to follow their husbands but who never worked outside their houses. In these families the income of the 'breadwinners', mainly the fathers, was enough for the survival of the family. The wives could then afford to follow the *purdah* but their daughters refused, not because of economic reasons but because their experiences in the city opened up new ways of renegotiating their roles as daughters and new opportunities for them (Dannecker, 2002).

As we can see the situation of children of migrant families in Dhaka city is quite contradictory and paradoxical. It includes young educated skilled men and women who well-adjust to the urban way of life (Begun, 1999) and who coexist with a majority of slum dwellers who somehow cope with their urban lives in terms of employment and shelter (Paul-Majumder et al., 1996) and pavement dwellers who do not even benefit from these minimal amenities (Begun, 1999).

### *Living conditions*

Most of the migrants considered in the literature examined in this analysis, settled in the *bustee* (slums) of the city which have been rapidly proliferating since the internal migration process took place. These squatter settlements are temporary structures, highly populated and

insanitary. There is a lack of adequate supplies of electricity, running water, paved roads and means of garbage disposal. The tin shelters are usually self constructed on and around public land, or they are rented from powerful people who have illegally occupied vacant public lands (Ullah et al., 1999). Governmental schools are often far from these settlements and over congested. Non-formal education programs are often run by NGOs, but the rate of attendance is often low and coupled with a high rate of drop-outs (Begum, 1999; Ullah et al., 1999; Paul-Majumder et al., 1996).

The state of the pavement dwellers can be described as even more deplorable since they survive in public places without any basic facilities. The majority of them are low skilled and illiterate. Their income is very low and they mainly rely on begging or occasional labour in the construction sector, or in other informal occupations. The decision to migrate is due to social reason combined with a strong economic need. The quest for more income in the city and the river erosion by floods were among the most frequent answers given by street dwellers for moving to Dhaka in Begum's (1999) analysis. Females also moved to the street if abandoned by their husbands or if for some reasons they had no other male member to look after them. Migrants on the street, in spite of the severity of their lives, once committed to the urban way of life, became convinced of benefits in the long term, and having little to return to, then opt for the poverty of the city rather than the poverty of the village (Begum, 1999: 21).

## **Links between migration and education**

The aim of this section is to explore the link between migration and the education of children migrating either on their own, or with their parents. I will start by providing a brief overview of the education system in Bangladesh, focusing on primary and secondary education and on the co-existence of formal and informal systems. I will then explore the education of migrant children in the sending and receiving areas in order to trace the link between education or the lack of it, and patterns of child migration.

Migrant children's education is affected by a number of factors which depend directly or indirectly on their migration patterns. Sometimes, the reasons which induce children to migrate in the first place are also the ones that take them out of school in their home village. This is, for example, what happens when children drop out of the

schools they used to attend in their villages due to abusive teachers' behaviour, bad school performances, or simply disinterest, and they therefore migrate to the city in search of work as an alternative to school. Other times, it is the migration process itself and the search for work that becomes the main cause of school abandonment and reintegration into a scholastic system in the city rarely becomes a priority. However, the proliferation of education programs run by NGOs in Dhaka especially designed to include working and street children might also reach children who never attended school before and who now have the chance to do it.

While the education of children migrating alone is much more likely to be affected by time constraints due to their need for work, the education of children migrating with their families depends greatly on the family's adjustment to the urban way of life and on their migration patterns. Many poor and better-off people settled in Dhaka may send their children to school when the right facilities are in place, and they may see education as a pathway to the new job possibilities offered by the urban setting; however, the same is less true for the very poorest (Kabeer, 2003). For pavement dwellers or seasonal migrant workers for example, who face major fluctuations in income streams and try to minimise their exposure to risk, there may be little motivation to send their children to school (Begum, 1999). The education of children of migrant families is also very much affected by the quality of the programmes available for these children as shown by the case of slum dwellers.

### *Education system in Bangladesh*

The Bangladeshi education system has been subject to several changes since the Independence war in 1971. The Compulsory Primary Education Act (1990), has made primary education in Bangladesh free and compulsory for all children. Ten years later, the 2000 declaration of the Dakar (Senegal) conference on education has set a new goal for the world to reach education for all (EFA) by 2015 (Nath and Chowdhury, 2000). However, this goal seems to be very challenging, not just in term of quantity but also in term of quality of education (MDG, 2005). Although the Bangladeshi government has given high priority to education in its development agenda through an increased budgetary allocation, resources remain far short of what is necessary to achieve this goal (Kabeer, 2003). Formal education is offered in Bangladesh in a 5-year cycle of primary education (grades 1-5), with children officially aged 6 to 10 years old; 5

years of secondary education (grades 6-10) and 2 years of higher secondary education (grades 11-12). Higher education comprises 2-5 years courses and beyond (Bangladesh Country Report, 1999).

Considerable progress has been made in promoting the enrolment rate in primary education, with special focus on the gender issues. Traditionally, girls tended to have a lower enrolment rate compared to their male counterpart but lately, following government efforts to reduce the gender gap, the situation seems to have reversed, with a net enrolment rate in primary education of 81% for boys and 84% for girls (BBS/Unicef, 2004). However, at least one third of those who enter primary education do not complete it, and those who do, take an average of over six years to complete the 5 year cycle. The drop-out rate shows a decreasing trend: in primary school for example it has fallen from 38 percent in 1994, to 33 percent in 2004, but there is still concern over the quality and the competency level of primary education, and over the low enrolment rate in secondary education (MDG, 2005). In fact, school enrolment rates fall drastically from primary to the secondary level, especially for girls. Only 8% of the age group of girls successfully complete the higher secondary cycle (BBS/Unicef, 2004).

The low learning achievement in basic education is one of the main problems in Bangladesh education. The crux of the issue is not whether children enrol and attend, but that they learn a lasting value by departure from school. The teaching-learning process tends to be didactic, focusing on memorising information rather than on developing analytical skills, with little emphasis on practical or vocational skills with curricula being poor and unimaginative. Furthermore, the effective time that teachers spend in learning activities within the school is very low due to their low attendance or irregular presence. Primary teachers tend in fact to spend a considerable portion of their time conducting other official duties unrelated to teaching, such as collecting data on child surveys, health and immunisation, as well as census. Teachers are not subject to any sanctions for their absenteeism or short-changing instructional time. They also tend to be professionally isolated, poorly motivated and lack supervision and support. Continuous assessment of student learning, an essential tool for improving student performance, is almost absent. As a result, school is ineffective and only about a half of those who complete primary school are thought to achieve a minimum basic education standard (BBS/Unicef, 2004).

In Bangladesh, basic education is delivered mainly by the formal system of government-run schools which co-exists with the non formal education system. The latter is run by the voluntary and non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and seeks to compensate for some of the deficiencies of the formal education system. Working children for example, constitute one of the groups excluded from formal education since it offers an inflexible school timetable that does not allow children to combine work with school. The development of non-formal education programs in Bangladesh has been a response to the demand from children of combining school with work. Central to its approach is the idea that a choice between work and school should not be forced and that access to formal schooling should not be seen as the only acceptable way for universalising education (Chowdhury, 2003). NGOs have been particularly active in promoting education programs in both rural and urban areas, aiming at including children from particularly disadvantaged groups. NGO schools now claim 8.5% of all primary enrolments in the country (Nath and Chowdhury, 2000).

It offers education to children who cannot or do not get enrolled in primary schools, those who drop out from schools and cannot be reintegrated into the formal system, the adolescents who relapse into illiteracy or those young and adult people who have never benefited from any schooling (Bangladesh Country Report, 1999). The school time table is flexible and concentrated to three hours per day which are decided by parent-teacher committees to ensure better attendance. It is a five year cycle so that children who graduate from it can enter the formal system directly at the secondary level. Although non-formal education system allows the combination of work and school, it is still not clear what this 'double burden' implies for children educational achievements or for their well-being. It is argued that the non-formal education system perpetuates social inequalities, by offering inferior forms of education to the children of the poor as well as encouraging child labour by allowing them to combine work and school (Kabeer, 2003).

#### *Education of children prior migration*

As I have explained in the previous section, child migrants moving to Dhaka city mainly come from rural villages all over Bangladesh. It is my intention at this stage to trace the level of education of children in the rural areas from where children migrate.

A number of studies have tried to explore the relation between work, poverty and school attendance. A quantitative study carried out by Ahmad and Quasem (1991) in four villages in Bangladesh, shows evidence that children's school enrolment depends on the modernisation of the village which in turn affects participation of children in economic activities within the family and in the labour market. 'Modernisation' is defined by taking into account different variables such as the closeness to administrative and industrial centres, the adoption of modern agricultural technology, the diversification of non-farm activities, better schools and improved transport, high adult literacy and high average income. The study found that school enrolment of children in rural areas varies according to the level of development of the village and the perceived costs and benefits of education. In advanced villages, for example, a high percentage of children were found to go to school while a low percentage were engaged in work. Conversely, in poor and remote villages "the necessity to work and the inability to bear the expenses of education induced child labour and discouraged school enrolment" (Ahmad and Quasem, 1991: 20).

In villages characterised by traditional technology, low-paid occupation, and where there is little demand for qualified skilled labour, parents were likely to perceive the returns to education as insignificant, thus discouraging children to go to school. Sending children to school also involves certain expenses, such as for clothes and examination fees, and these represent a large amount of money for poor families. Although primary education is free, it also has an indirect cost for families who could otherwise employ their children in paid work or in domestic chores. All these findings suggest that both poverty and the perceived costs and benefits of education, which is in turn influenced by the level of development of the village, affect child labour and their enrolment in school. The same authors also stressed the importance of gender bias in school attendance. Parents sent their sons to school even in remote villages while girls' school attendance depended on the nearness to schools. In villages near to administrative centres, for example, the rate of enrolment was higher for girls than for boys.

Pelto (1997) carried out for Unicef a qualitative study based on hundreds of interviews with children from the cities, aiming to explore the world of working children in the country. He found that the majority of children working in Dhaka city had all migrated from rural areas either on their own or with the company of relatives, friends or parents.

When investigating if these working children had attended school in the past back in their villages, he found out that out of a sample of 1423 children, 48 per cent never attended school while among the 43 per cent who attended school in the past, the majority had dropped out before completing the five year cycle of primary education. Poverty was the main reason given by children for not attending school or dropping out followed by time constraint due to work. Several children also spoke of having left school because of lack of interest in it or due to teacher's abusive behaviour.

As we have seen in the previous sub-section, school is often perceived by pupils as boring due to the lack of imaginative curriculum and due to outmoded teaching methods that seem too distant from the daily lives of the children. Pupils also reported to be beaten by teachers for not being good students or not accomplishing their scholastic tasks and this represented one of the main reasons that made them leave school. Once out of school they felt they had to compensate for dropping out by paid work, or they were forced by their families to migrate to the city where they could be engaged in some productive activities. Similarly, Iversen (2002), in a study on child labour migrants from rural India, explains that parents were very much concerned about their children being idle, so once they dropped out from school for some reason, they were encouraged to migrate for work, since job opportunities were not available in the villages.

Many scholars found that another factor affecting child enrolment at school was the level of education of their parents. If either parent is educated, this increases the probability of children of entering school and reaching secondary education. However several quantitative studies (Canals-Cerda and Ridao-Cano, 2004; Montgomery et al., 1999; Ahmad and Quasem, 1991) show that women's education was far more important than that of their spouse in increasing the likelihood of children's education. This differential effect of education by gender of the parent may suggest that women have a higher preference for child schooling than men do (Canals-Cerda and Ridao-Cano, 2004).

#### *Education of children after migration*

Trying to understand if child migrants attend school once they arrive in the destination area is difficult, due to the dearth of careful statistical data on this specific topic and on migration of children in general. However, it is possible to make some assumptions using the literature available on child labour discourse. As explained in the previous

section, the majority of children migrating to Dhaka city are engaged in some sort of working activity. Some of them are involved in jobs all day long, such as those employed as domestic workers or shop takers, while others, especially if self employed, might have more chance for free time out of work.

The issue of child labour and education has been well analysed by several authors. A recent research (Kabeer et al., 2003) on this topic in India and Bangladesh, provides an holistic perspective on the apparent conflict that is posed between the economic needs of families and the right to education of their children. The research analyses in depth the correlation between poverty, child labour and poor educational outcomes. In the case of Bangladesh, at the national level, it was found that the greater progress in expanding primary education has been associated with a similar expansion in the incidence of child labour. This suggests that "the increased school attendance in Bangladesh has been combined with work rather than replacing it" (Kabeer, 2003: 356).

However, the efforts made by NGOs of developing, flexible, non-formal education programs especially designed to accommodate children's work and education have raised some questions regarding their educational achievements and well-being (Chowdury, 2003). According to Kabeer's (2003: 354) analysis of the literature in this regard, scholars closer to the idealist position believe that "offering non-formal education merely perpetuates both child labour, by allowing children to combine work and school, as well as social inequalities, by offering inferior forms of education to the children of the poor". Conversely, scholars close to the realistic approach argue that a single formal system of education with no allowances for these circumstances, would force parents or children to choose between school and work with the consequent impoverishment of the former.

Kabeer's review of the literature also suggests that explanation for poor educational outcomes and child labour are "mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive" (Kabeer, 2003: 383). The same author expands saying that it is very difficult to separate out the extent to which the supply of child labour is due to the poverty of the households and how much of it is the response to inadequacies in the provision of education. In other words, while there is evidence of a casual relationship between household poverty, the supply of child labour and poor educational outcomes, what is not clear cut is whether this interdependence works primarily

through material factors such as school fees and the need for children's income, or through ideological factors such as the perceived irrelevance of education for the poor, or the exclusionary attitudes of teachers towards the children of the poor (Kabeer, 2003). Interviews with children also have an important role in explaining some of the reasons for both the persistence of child labour as well as their absence from school, pointing to the poor standard of education received and teachers' abusive behaviour (Kabeer, 2003; Boyden and Myers, 1998).

Advocacy literature on child labour often mentions children not being at school due to their migration to Dhaka city (Pelto, 1997; Boyden and Myers, 1998; Woodhead, 1998; Tolfree, 1998). However, in depth interviews show that some of these children would like to get further schooling once settled in the destination areas, if it were economically feasible for them. They point out that school should be available at a time of day that does not interfere with their working schedules (Boyden and Myers, 1998). This clear preference in combining school with work justifies the increasing number of education projects run by NGOs in the country and especially in Dhaka city.

According to Pelto (1997) the school issue has been put into special visibility with regard to urban working children as a consequence of the increasing number of families and children migrating to Dhaka city. The same author argues that the development of schooling in Dhaka city is made more complex by a number of social factors that differentiate an urban situation from the more traditional one. In urban settings for example, there is a high number of children who live at or near their workplaces instead of their family homes. Furthermore, in the urban situation of social anonymity, there are greatly increased possibilities for exploitation of children since they are essentially on their own most of the time. Family, kinsmen and other acquaintances are not there to give support or surveillance of children. These findings portray urban children as much more vulnerable compared to those living in rural areas.

Most of the migrant children and families considered in this analysis, have settled in the *bustee* (slums) of the city which have been rapidly expanding since the internal migration process took place. Several studies on squatter settlements in Dhaka city (Begum, 1999; Ullah, 1999; Paul-Majumder et al, 1996) portray the education of slum children quite negatively. In spite of the efforts made by government as well as NGOs to

expand the infrastructures of the primary school system and a motivational campaign to increase enrolment, the education of child slum dwellers suffers tremendously. According to these authors, physical facilities are very poor, school materials such as test and exercise books, pencils and papers are not available to children, nor have they money to buy them. Teachers are paid very low and irregular salaries often causing their absenteeism from school. According to Ullah's study, among 108 school age children identified in Khilgaon Railway slum, only 10% went to school.

Although parents highly valued education for their children, the inadequate number of schools, together with poverty and the inability to pay private tuition to their children were the main reasons given by parents for not sending their children to school. According to a study carried out by Ahmad (2004) in Mirpur slum in Dhaka city, the state-run schools perpetuate inequality between different classes, thus broadening the gap of the quality of education offered to poor and rich people. In the case of Monipur *bustee* for instance, the lack of proper facilities both in terms of quality and services delivered in the classroom, and the inadequate student-teacher ratio, leads to children's need for more support at home with their studies. Since most parents in the slums are illiterate, they cannot help children with text-based lessons, therefore they should hire school teachers to do the teaching at home as they are unable to cope. But poor slum dwellers can rarely afford to pay private tuition so that their children are more likely to abandon school.

### *Concluding discussion*

Education is believed to be a positive thing and most of the research on child labour mentioning child migration, portrays their movement as having a negative effect on their education. However the linkages between migration and education are more complex than the simple assumption that children's migration undermines children's education and, the literature suggests a more ambivalent picture, shedding light on more negative, as well as positive aspects.

This is the case, for example, of children migrating with their families. We have already seen in the previous section that for many rural women moving to Dhaka to work in the garment sector for example, one of the main reasons which 'pushed' them to take up this kind of work, was the quest for money to provide a better life and education for their children (Kabeer, 2000; Dannecker, 2002).

Furthermore, children of migrant families might benefit from the changes that the migration process has brought to their parents' perception of education. Migrants parents who were not educated themselves or were unable to continue school in the village, may now be encouraged to send their children to school, especially when school is free. Parents may accept education as having a positive effect on children, which would enhance their children's quality of life and help them improve their own lives in the urban setting.

Children's education in urban areas can also have effects on the migration flow of children coming from rural areas. Therese Blanchet's (1996) research on child domestic workers in Bangladesh for example, suggests that in middle class families living in urban environments, children are more likely to attend school and therefore will be less involved in domestic chores. This creates a demand for domestic workers, which might be recruited from poor families in rural villages. The increased scholarisation of middle-class children may therefore have negative consequences on the education of poor rural children, thus strengthening inequality between rich and poor in Bangladeshi society.

Migrant children's education is also affected by patterns of circular migration. This happens for instance to the children of migrating seasonal workers who accompany their parents to the city and then back again to the rural area. This movement in fact affects their attendance at school in a number of ways. First of all, when parents are forced to migrate seasonally in search of work due to the dearth of local opportunities, there may be little motivation to send their children to school and they are more likely to be employed in a variety of ways to help countering the insecurity of livelihoods (Burra, 1995).

Furthermore, these children are likely not to be included in any educational program neither in the villages nor in urban settings. Formal education programs for example adopt very rigid admission schedules and once a child drops out of school or is absent for a long period is unlikely to be re-admitted at school. On the other side, non-formal education programs are very much reluctant to accept children of 'floating families' since they are likely to abandon the school at some point. UCEP (Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme), a Bangladeshi NGO specialised in education project since 1974, adopts certain criteria to admit children to its school, highlighting how the mobility of children both alone or with parents or

relatives affects in some way their acceptance at school. UCEP's admission policy for example, states that the family must have been living in the area close to the school for a period of not less than two years and are expected to remain in the neighbourhood for the four years after the child is admitted. Children must also have a regular guardian, preferably parents (Tolfree, 1998). This admission policy is not unique of UCEP but is adopted by many other NGOs running education projects and it reflects the pressure that donors put on NGOs in order to have the minimum rate of dropouts.

As we can see from the above discussion the inter-link between education and patterns of child migration is complex and depends on a number of factors which are intertwined with the child labour discourse, especially when children move to the city on their own. For children migrating with their parents, the migration process may in some cases open up the enhancement of children's education due to the higher demand for educated people in the labour market and the change in parents' perception towards education. Although poverty is often mentioned by both parents and children as the main reason for not sending children to school in both sending and receiving areas; this section has shed light on the poor standard of education as the fundamental cause of education failure.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to explore child migration patterns in a country where, culturally and traditionally, children are confined to a respectful and docile passive role. The aim of this work is to explore the reasons behind child migration both autonomous and with their parents, as well as understand the consequences that the migration process has on the education of children in Bangladesh.

From the review of the existing literature on this topic, it becomes clear that the assumption that children's migration undermines their education is perhaps too simplistic. Several empirical studies for example, showed evidence that some families decided to move to the capital to provide a better life and education for their children. In the case of children migrating with their families, therefore, children's education depends greatly on the family's adjustment to the urban way of life as well as on the reasons that induced them to migrate in the first place. It has been showed also, how the movement to the capital city of Dhaka may change parents' perception of the benefits gained by their

children's education. The experience in the city in fact, might offer new job opportunities for more educated young people compared to the ones available back in their home villages.

However, many migrants do not perceive their move to be a permanent one, and where education systems do not allow for such movements, or when multiple movements affect a child's ability to attend and realise their potential, children are often denied the chance to regularly attend school. Children's education chances are also affected by migrants' perceptions of a location change being temporary: in Bangladesh, many migrants moving to Dhaka believe that they are there in order to save money and thus they keep their expenditure on living conditions and on social services to a minimum. In such a context, the education of their children becomes the last of their priorities.

Autonomous children's migration and its impact on their education, again is complex and, to a great extent, intertwined with the child labour issue. We have seen that children move to Dhaka city for a number of reasons. The poverty argument is definitely very strong in Bangladesh and of crucial importance to explain the patterns of child migration; however, others reasons such as the high rate of unemployment, the rupture of family relationships, the high demand for child domestic workers in the city, as well as others matters related to the poor quality of education, are all 'push' factors which contribute to children's departure from home. In this paper, the theories used to explain the migration of children mainly refer to 'push and pull' factors theory and to the social capital one, albeit the latter mainly refers to family based social networks.

The education of children who autonomously moved to Dhaka city is much likely to be affected by time constraints due to their need for work, therefore it is assumed that their labour migration affects negatively their education. However, when investigating the level of children's education when they were still living in rural areas and especially in very poor villages, it was found that their school attendance was already affected by poverty, the perceived costs and benefits of education, as well as the poor quality of it. Furthermore, poor families in rural villages cannot afford to keep their children idle and, the drop out of school often leads to child labour migration. On the other hand, once they arrived in Dhaka city, either they are engaged in full time work or they have to combine work with school offered by the more flexible non-formal education system. What is still not clear is what this

'double burden' implies for children educational achievements or for their well-being. Kabeer (2003) for example argues that the non-formal education system perpetuates social inequalities, by offering inferior forms of education to the children of the poor as well as encouraging child labour by allowing them to combine work and school.

To conclude, the inter-link between child migration and education is not clear-cut but it points to poverty and poor standard of education in the country.

Emphasizing the various ways in which children's migration influences their education and vice versa; thus acknowledging a complexity which goes way beyond the simple notion that migration threatens education; allows a deeper understanding of the different modes of interaction between child migration and education. Therefore, further research exploring the active roles of children in the migration process, particularly related to their education, is crucial for the development of well-tuned education projects and policies, which are not only relevant to the case of migrant children in Dhaka city, but for child migrants in other developing countries as well.

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